Implications of the Recent Operation in Venezuela for India

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Introduction

India and Venezuela have traditionally enjoyed cordial and cooperative relations, rooted in shared interests across energy cooperation, South-South engagement, and participation in multilateral institutions such as the United Nations (UN) and the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). The bilateral relationship reached an important milestone with the celebration of 65 years of diplomatic relations in 2024, and both countries have maintained resident embassies in each other's capitals for over four decades.

While diplomatic ties have remained stable and civil, the intensity and scope of engagement have fluctuated in response to Venezuela's prolonged political instability, economic collapse, and increasing international isolation. India has maintained a calibrated and pragmatic approach, avoided abrupt policy shifts while preserved diplomatic channels and functional cooperation.

India's approach towards Venezuela has been guided by its core foreign-policy principles: sovereignty, non-intervention, peaceful resolution of disputes, and strategic autonomy. New Delhi has consistently refrained from taking partisan positions in Venezuela's internal political developments, instead emphasising dialogue, international legality, and multilateral mechanisms. This position reflects India's broader worldview, which prioritises a rules-based international order while resisting coercive or unilateral interventions.

Economic relations, though never expansive, were strategically significant during the late 2000s and early 2010s, particularly in the energy domain. Venezuela emerged as an important crude oil supplier to India, and Indian public sector enterprises—most notably ONGC Videsh Limited—invested in Venezuelan oil projects. Long-term supply arrangements, including those involving Reliance Industries Limited, further underscored the strategic value of the relationship. However, international sanctions, operational constraints, declining Venezuelan oil production, and payment risks sharply reduced bilateral trade and energy cooperation in subsequent years.

Political engagement nevertheless continued through high-level visits and interactions on the margins of NAM summits, UN General Assembly sessions, BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa)-related meetings, and sectoral forums. Cooperation expanded incrementally into areas such as digital transformation, renewable energy, defence education, and multilateral coordination. Cultural and educational ties remained a notable strength, encompassing yoga, Ayurveda, Indian cinema, Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation training programmes, Indian Council for Cultural Relations scholarships, and India-UN Development Programme

community development initiatives. The Indian diaspora in Venezuela is small, and ensuring consular protection during periods of instability has remained a consistent priority.

Against this backdrop, recent political and military developments in Venezuela have added a new layer of complexity to an already constrained bilateral relationship.[1] [2]

Diplomatic and Foreign Policy Implications

The recent military operation in Venezuela has placed India in a diplomatically delicate position, compelling it to balance principled foreign-policy commitments with pragmatic strategic interests. India's official response has expressed deep concern over the evolving situation, emphasising close monitoring of developments and reaffirming support for the well-being and safety of the Venezuelan people. New Delhi has called upon all concerned parties to resolve differences peacefully through dialogue and to ensure regional peace and stability.[3] In line with established practice, India has activated its consular mechanisms, with the Embassy of India in Caracas remaining in contact with members of the Indian community and offering necessary assistance.[4] This measured response reflects India's preference for restraint, consistency, and predictability in its external engagements.

This approach reflected India's effort to balance its moral commitment to peace and stability with broader strategic considerations, including relations with the United States and expectations from the Global South.[5] Meanwhile, the Communist Party of India (Marxist) organised protests in Delhi and other parts of India, denouncing the US action. CPI(M) leader M A Baby described it as "Naked aggression", with Left parties calling for nationwide demonstrations in solidarity with Venezuela.[6]

At a broader level, the episode highlights the challenge India faces in managing relations with major powers while maintaining credibility as an independent, norm-driven actor. India's response neither endorses nor explicitly condemns the operation, instead reaffirming principles of sovereignty and peaceful dispute resolution. Such regulated diplomacy enables India to preserve working relationships across geopolitical divides while avoiding entanglement in polarising confrontations.

Global Reactions to the US Intervention in Venezuela: India's Attuned Response and the Emerging Diplomatic Divide

In contrast, China and Russia issued strong condemnations of the US action. China called on the United States to immediately release President Maduro and his wife, describing the seizure as a grave violation of international law, basic norms of international relations, and the principles of the UN Charter, while urging dialogue and negotiation. Russia went further, terming the US move an "Act of armed aggression" against Venezuela and calling it deeply concerning and condemnable. Brazil, India's key

partner in South America and a fellow BRICS member, also sharply criticised the action, with President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva stating that the bombings and capture of Venezuela's President crossed an unacceptable line, violated sovereignty, and set a dangerous precedent undermining multilateralism and international law.

Several European leaders adopted more nuanced positions. French President Emmanuel Macron stressed that any transition must be peaceful, democratic, and respectful of the will of the Venezuelan people, expressing hope that the elected leadership would ensure a swift transition. German Chancellor Friedrich Merz noted that the legal assessment of the US operation was complex and required careful evaluation, underlining that international law must apply and warning against political instability. British Prime Minister Keir Starmer avoided confrontation with Washington, stating that facts needed to be established first, clarifying that the UK was not involved, and reiterating the importance of upholding international law.

Other international responses reflected divergent alignments. South Africa refrained from taking a definitive position, instead calling on the UN Security Council to urgently convene to address the situation, highlighting a preference for multilateral resolution. At the same time, Israel and Argentina openly supported the US action, underscoring the emerging geopolitical divide in international reactions. Taken together, the responses reveal a fragmented global landscape, with countries weighing sovereignty, international law, strategic alignments, and regional stability differently in their reactions to the events in Venezuela.[7]

Strategic Signalling and Global South Positioning

India's response carries wider geopolitical consequence, markedly in the perspective of Global South politics and standardising leadership. Unilateral military actions—especially those undertaken without clear multilateral approval—raise concerns regarding precedents in international conduct and the erosion of collective security mechanisms.

By avoiding explicit affiliation and echoing observance to international law, India fortifies its image as a mature participant committed to multilateralism. This posture aligns with India's constant activism for rule-based global governance in forums such as the United Nations, BRICS, NAM, and the G20. For many developing countries, India's approach is viewed as an expression of strategic sovereignty and a commitment to balanced and inclusive international engagement.

At a time when the Global South is increasingly fragmented and contested, India's position strengthens its claim to moral and normative leadership—particularly as it seeks to position itself as a bridge between developed and developing worlds.

Economic and Energy Considerations

From an economic perspective, the immediate impact on India is limited. India's trade and energy engagement with Venezuela had already been substantially reduced due to sanctions, payment constraints, and declining Venezuelan output. As a result, short-term disruptions to India's energy security or trade flows are unlikely.

However, the episode carries longer-term deliberate consequences. Any future maintenance of Venezuela's political and economic ecosystem, coupled with relief, could reopen avenues for energy cooperation. India may seek to protect or reclaim past investments, renegotiate held up projects, or re-enter challenging ventures, particularly if Venezuela undertakes fundamental developments in its energy sector. These possibilities, however, remain highly provisional on political outcomes, international alignments, and market conditions.

For India, diversification of energy sources remains a priority, and Venezuela—despite its vast reserves—will likely remain a conditional partner rather than a core supplier in the foreseeable future.

Diaspora and Consular Concerns

The operation has also highlighted human security considerations, particularly regarding the safety of Indian nationals residing in Venezuela. Although the Indian diaspora is small, episodes of heightened instability necessitate increased consular vigilance, timely travel advisories, and contingency planning.

This episode emphasises the significance of robust evacuation readiness and crisis-response mechanisms for Indian citizens in unstable regions. It also underscores the growing significance of consular diplomacy as an integral element of India's foreign policy, especially in an era of frequent political disruptions and conflict.

Implications for India–US Relations

From a strategic perception, recent events may introduce areas requiring cautious diplomatic management in India–US relations. While bilateral cooperation across defence, technology, trade, and broader strategic domains continues to intensify, India's emphasis on sovereignty and observance to international law reflects its reliable penchant for ethical and legally grounded approaches to international problems.

Such disagreements in emphasis are unlikely to affect the overall trajectory of the bilateral partnership, which is anchored in shared interests and long-term convergence. Rather, they highlight India's approach of engaging constructively with partners on the basis of issue-specific alignment, while retaining the space to articulate independent perspectives where necessary. India's ability to work closely with the US, even as it maintains sovereignty in its standings on global occurrences, remains a token of its existing foreign policy.

Second-Order Consequences for the Rules-Based International Order

Beyond its immediate diplomatic and regional outcomes, the operation in Venezuela carries substantial second-order consequences for the international system. Chief among these is the precedent it sets for the discerning relevance of international law. When major powers undertake powerful military actions without clear multilateral approval, they weaken the normative difference between lawful application and unilateral declaration of power. Over time, such practices risk normalising a progressive world in which legality becomes contingent on capability rather than consensus. This erosion of predictability weakens the deterrent value of international norms, particularly for smaller and middle powers that rely on rules-based mechanisms for security and dispute resolution.

Repeated bypassing of multilateral institutions—especially the UN—weakens collective security and erodes trust in international law. When rules are applied selectively, based on power rather than principle, global governance becomes less predictable. For India, this complicates diplomacy and reinforces the need to consistently uphold international law, even when it diverges from partners' positions, while working with like-minded states to rebalance power with rules.

Conclusion

The developments in Venezuela have limited immediate impact on India but carry significant long-term strategic implications. They reflect a global shift towards unilateralism, selective legality, and transactional power politics, placing strain on multilateral norms. For India, this environment demands vigilance and principled engagement without alignment. New Delhi must monitor evolving precedents on sovereignty and intervention, particularly in regions closer to its interests, while using quiet diplomacy and coordination with like-minded middle powers to uphold international law. Simultaneously, India should remain prepared to protect its economic interests, energy options, and citizens abroad. Balancing principle with pragmatic flexibility will be central to sustaining India's strategic autonomy.

Endnotes

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[6] "India Expresses Deep Concern over US Capture of Venezuela Protests in Different States," *The New Indian Express*, accessed **05 Jan 2026**, https://www.newindianexpress.com/videos/videos-nation/2026/Jan/04/india-expresses-deep-concern-over-us-capture-of-venezuela-protests-in-different-states
[7] "India on Venezuela: Support for People, Calls for Peaceful Dialogue", ibid.

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